

RALPH

8th Grader with Learning Disability

Substantive Very Serious Threat, Increasing Aggression Pattern, Gang Involved

Ralph is an 8th grade student with a reading disability who has been in the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) since 4th grade. His parents are non-English speaking immigrants. Ralph has had 17 office referrals in two years and has had numerous serious fights in the last two years on and off campus. Offenses have been refusing to do work, improper clothing, swearing at teachers, failing to suit out for PE, physical fighting with peers in the hallways and on the yard as well as reportedly sexual harassment of a 6th grade girl off campus. This aggression pattern towards others and breaking of school rules has increased in intensity since entering middle school as a 6th grader. There were no offenses prior to middle school and he has been in the same district since 2nd grade. His grades in elementary school were “B”s and “C”s. In middle school his grades have dropped to an average of “D+”. There has been no behavior support plan for Ralph, though he did participate in a bi-weekly “motivation” group with the counselor.

Ralph has recently made a verbal threat to harm a peer, “I’m going to have my friends kill you.” He does not deny making the statement. His friends are gang involved youth. The police have become involved as a result of a school-based threat assessment team recommendation. No guns were found in the home, though police report gang activity involving weapons in the area.

Expulsion was initially recommended, and the IEP team held the required manifestation determination meeting and conducted the functional behavioral assessment. In this multi-step process it was concluded that this threat was not related to his disability, but that it was part of his increasing aggression towards peers that should have resulted in an IEP that addressed the “behavior interfering with learning of the student or peers.” Therefore, his IEP team determined that the IEP at the time of the incident was not appropriate and moving forward to expulsion was not recommended. Ralph’s parents have accepted an IEP team recommendation for alternate placement.

The results of the necessary functional behavioral assessment during the expulsion process were clear: Ralph’s verbal threat making was an attempt to gain attention, recognition and status from gang involved peers, just like all the other aggressive behavior he had previously demonstrated. Ralph himself was discovered to be a member of a gang. Ralph’s parents were very upset because of the lack of previous school attention, as well as the court’s appointment of a probation officer to monitor his activities following a recent shoplifting episode. They were pleased to note that the alternate setting recommended by the probation officer at the IEP team meeting would be implementing a behavior support plan and communicating with them regularly.